



M U S I C

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS
has also written

HAPPINESS
LOVE
MEMORY

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By

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FIRST EDITION

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I

MUSIC IS ESSENTIALLY the manly art. There are more first-class women athletes than there are women who compose music. There are more good women football players than there are great women composers. In the entire history of music, in all times and countries, there has never been a woman able to write first-rate music.

I believe that listening to great music is one of the most important, yes, one of the most essential occupations for the average man. I am writing exclusively for the unconverted. I am talking to men who are bored by symphony concerts or who are afraid

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they will be bored. I am addressing those who believe they are not musical.

I have in mind an American family at dinner—father, mother, sons and daughters—discussing the Beethoven Symphony concert as eagerly as women now discuss clothes, and men discuss athletic sport. Why do average, healthy, respectable American men and boys hate good music? Perhaps you will say they don't. Unfortunately they do. The majority of respectable men are bored by classical music, and will not go to a symphony concert unless there is some famous soloist.

Why do they hate good music? The answer is simple. It is because they do not listen.

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I was once myself in that condition of ignorance and darkness. With no one to teach me, with no explanatory books, with no musical education, I became a passionate, discriminating lover of the best music.

Today I had far rather hear good music than hear anything else on earth. No music is too elevated for me. The stiffer the programme, the better it is.

When I was twenty years old, a sophomore in college, I had no liking for real music. I enjoyed a comic opera and a brass band. While I was in this state of masculine Philistine darkness, Theodore Thomas came to New Haven with a large orchestra, and announced that he would give a series of concerts. The first one would

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be composed of the works of Beethoven and Wagner. To me this sounded terrible and terrifying; but being willing and even anxious to educate myself, if such a thing were possible, I enquired of a cultivated lady if she thought it would be worth my while to attend. Immediately a look of professional rapture came over her face and she said, "It will be heavenly!" I could tell by her expression that she was lying. *Music breeds liars*. Talk about religious cant—I have heard much more artistic and musical cant than I have heard of the sanctimonious brand. Then I went to another woman, in whose judgment I had more confidence, and she told me it was my duty and it ought to be my pleasure to go.

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I went. Never shall I forget the boredom of that evening. Theodore Thomas was a great conductor, he had a competent orchestra, and the compositions were by two men of genius—Beethoven and Wagner. I was bored to death. I suffered horribly. It was not imaginary pain, it was genuine distress and agony. I looked at the busy musicians and thought, “Oh, if they would only stop, or play a tune!” After a while they did stop, and actually they were applauded! I whispered, “That’s over!” My neighbour said, “That’s only the first movement.” I had no idea what a movement was, but I was sure two would be worse than one. And so it proved. I felt more and more wretched.

I gazed idly over the audience to

see how my fellow sufferers were enduring it. Some of them were asleep. How I envied them! The hideous noises were going ahead on the stage, but these blissful souls were free from pain. The operation went on, but they had an anesthetic.

Some other men had awakened suddenly from a nap to sit up straight and glare defiantly around, as if to say "I dare you to say I have been asleep!" Others were trying to look intelligent, exactly the way people look when a lecturer quotes something in a foreign language. But instead of looking intelligent, they looked depressed. Apparently they thought that music should produce melancholy and that if they only looked sufficiently sad, some one might think

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they were appreciating it. But they did not fool me. I knew they were having a bad time, and that they would be relieved when the concert was over and they could go somewhere, anywhere.

Continuing to look attentively at the faces of the audience, I observed here and there persons who were enjoying the occasion. They were happy. Some of them were in bliss. They had a celestial expression, and it was not a pose. They did not know I was looking at them: it was not an assumed face like a mask; they were rapturously receiving this terrible noise into their hearts.

Now they had paid no more for their seats than I had. They had paid a dollar and I had paid a dollar. They

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were getting everything, I was getting nothing. I am a Yankee, and I like to get the worth of my money. I could not endure the thought that something splendid was going on and I was missing it. And I began to believe it was not the fault of Beethoven and Wagner.

What an idiot I should have been if I had gone home that night and said, "Never again! I am not musical." Then I might have passed through life and missed one of the richest sources of happiness. When I think of what music has meant to me, what enormous and exquisite delight I have received from it in Europe and in America, with what passion and intensity I love it, it seems strange that the very music I have enjoyed so

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much, and for so many years, should on that first evening have hurt my ears and bored my mind.

Thinking it over after that concert, I said to myself, "There must be something great here. I don't get it, but I will go again." I went to the next concert. It was almost as bad. I was bored again, though perhaps not so hideously as on the former occasion. Well, I kept going. After a while I began to see rifts in the clouds, mountains in the fog, light in the darkness, a suggestion of something splendid. After repeated listenings, I reached the state where I had rather hear a competent orchestra play Beethoven and Wagner than hear anything else. And I reached this state of bliss not by study, not by reading books, but

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simply by listening—*listening with all my might.*

I am not a musician. I can play no musical instrument. The first thing I do when I get to heaven will be to learn the piano. I shall spend the first million years on the piano. It will take me about that length of time to master the instrument.

One can never appreciate great music unless one listens with serious and devoted attention. It is probable that half the men in the audience at a symphony concert are not really listening. They are thinking of something else. How ought one to listen to music?

Suppose a business man is sitting in his office and a visitor appears, a visitor in whose judgment he has con-

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fidence. The visitor sets forth a scheme by which the business man will make a million dollars in three months. While this scheme is being explained, the business man listens. He gives the matter his entire attention. He is not absent minded. He is not thinking of women, or of golf, or of any other matters. He gives the visitor his attention because there is "money in it." Well, that is the way a man should listen to the music of Beethoven and Wagner. He should concentrate his entire listening power. Listening in that way is not passive, it is active. It is the outpouring of the energy of the mind.

It is more important to listen to great music than it is to listen to a business proposition. Money can do no

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more than buy happiness, and there are few higher forms of happiness than listening to music. I love money as much as the average man. But if I had to choose between one million dollars and the love of music, I should not hesitate a moment. I would not give up my happiness in music for any sum of money.

Speaking from personal experience, knowing exactly what I am talking about, I maintain that all one needs, to become a passionate, intelligent, discriminating lover of the greatest music, is normal hearing and a strong will. If one is deaf, or lacking in determination and perseverance, then one cannot become a lover of music. But if one can and will listen, that is all that is necessary. Music will do the

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rest. But one must listen, listen as if it were one's only means of salvation.

Professor Horatio Parker, a distinguished musical composer, told me he thought I enjoyed music more than he did. He, being a professional musician, could not hear music without thinking how it was constructed, without taking it to pieces, analyzing it: whereas I simply listen to the total, collective effect of the harmonies. Furthermore, he had that very rare gift, absolute pitch, so that the slightest deviation from the pitch by any player in the orchestra gave him torture. I do not know how that is. All I do know is that I have never seen anyone who loved the best music more than I, or who got more delight from it. Thus, while I wish I were a mu-

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sician, I know that neither a knowledge of the theory of music nor the ability to play an instrument is necessary to one's enjoyment. Anyone may have this happiness in his life who will take the trouble to listen.

Just as it is fortunate if one knows many lines of fine poetry by heart, so it is fortunate that if we listen often to great music we can at will reproduce some of it in our minds. A Philadelphia physician told me that he had committed to memory so many poems that insomnia no longer had any terrors; if he could not sleep, he repeated in his mind his favourite passages of poetry. Well, as I have said, I cannot play any musical instrument, and I know nothing of the theory of music, having never studied

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harmony or counterpoint. But at any moment, I can call up the orchestras in my mind and distinctly hear the opening passages from the *Allegretto* of the Seventh Symphony; many parts of the Waldstein Sonata; my favourite passage from the Ninth Symphony, which Beethoven gave to the second violins; and innumerable selections from the operas of Wagner. So long as I live, great music is a part of my inner conscious life.

II

WHEN WE CONSIDER the age of most of the arts, and find that literature, architecture, drawing, etc. are nearly as old as humanity, it is astounding that music, the greatest of all, should be an affair of yesterday. If we had been living two hundred years ago, we should have missed nearly all the great music of the world. Of course songs and tunes of some kind were in evidence in the remote past; but standard works of music played today by orchestras, and sung on the operatic stage, do not go back more than two centuries. Music, as it appears on programmes today, begins with John Sebastian Bach, who died in 1750. Indeed so

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recent is the divine art of music, that Robert Browning believed that music was not nearly so permanent as poetry; that the swiftly changing fashions in music would never give to Beethoven and Wagner the immortality of Homer.

Music is the only universal language. In a world that has so much misfortune and bad luck, it seems an incredibly happy chance that musical notation should be in nearly all nations the same. If one wishes to read Goethe in the original, one must learn German; if Tolstoi, Russian; if Dante, Italian; if Ibsen, Norwegian. How fortunate therefore that Beethoven, Verdi, Chaikovski, Grieg wrote in exactly the same language.

The paradox is that Music, the most

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universal of languages, knowing no boundary lines, should have been monopolised by the Germans. There is no reason for this, no adequate cause, no explainable antecedent. If one collected all the music in the world written by men who were not Germans, put it together, and multiplied it by ten, the product would not equal in value the music written by Germans alone. In the Music Hall facing the lake on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, the committee placed on the façade the names of what they considered to be the five greatest composers in all history. They are Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Schubert—all Germans. And the first names on a substitute list would also be Germans.

III

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC set forth by Arthur Schopenhauer impressed Wagner so deeply that he said it was the only thing that gave any comfort to his tormented mind on long, sleepless nights.

Any philosophy of music, any serious attempt to interpret its hidden meaning, is both interesting and profitable to consider; because no one can express either in spoken or written words the effect produced by music; for pure music is a language of its own, quite untranslatable by pencil or by pen. It is the greatest of all the arts, because it speaks to us with a direct force and with a hint of infinite

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meaning entirely beyond the range of painting, poetry, sculpture, and architecture. The fact that when we try to explain even in our own thoughts how "music makes us feel" we are immediately baffled, is perhaps in itself an indication that music penetrates deeper than the foundations of speech. Many philosophers and poets have nevertheless attempted the task, but the only representative of each class that has even shadowed the truth is, among the philosophers, Schopenhauer; and among the poets, Robert Browning. Each of these had studied the theory of music, and each was fond of playing an instrument, Schopenhauer the flute, and Browning the piano.

In spite of the fact that the father

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of Browning's mother was the son of a German, and that Browning had travelled through the most picturesque parts of Germany, and that he was familiar with the best things in German literature, his poems show few traces of German influence. Next to England, Italy and France were the countries he loved, and his work abounds in French and Italian literary and topographical allusions; Germany and the Germans seem to have aroused little curiosity and to have given him little inspiration. So far as I know, his poetry makes no explicit reference to the teachings of Arthur Schopenhauer. From time to time we find a contemptuous thrust at the doctrine of pessimism, as in the poem, *At the Mermaid*, where he ridicules

Weltschmerz; but I can recall no passage containing anything like an acknowledgment of Schopenhauer's influence. Yet Browning's philosophy of music, as expressed particularly in *Abt Vogler* and in *Charles Avison*, is surprisingly similar to that stated definitely by Schopenhauer in his master-work, *The World as Will and Idea* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*).

Schopenhauer's book was published in 1819, and its author believed he had written a work of original genius, destined to have a prodigious and permanent influence in all parts of the world. For twenty years it suffered as total neglect as any printed page could find; but not for one moment did its author lose faith in it or in himself.

About 1840 it emerged from oblivion, and in 1844 Schopenhauer at last succeeded in persuading a publisher to issue a new and enlarged edition. From that time to his death in 1860, Schopenhauer enjoyed the sweets of fame, and today the width of his influence in thought and in literature can hardly be over-estimated. We may not like him, but we shall never be rid of him. In the 'Eighties, his book was admirably translated into English by R. B. (later Lord) Haldane, assisted by Mr. Kemp; and it is not at all impossible that Browning read the English version with some interest and profit, for *Charles Avison* was published in 1887. It is probable, however, that Browning had studied

Schopenhauer in the original before 1855.

Schopenhauer was the greatest pessimist, and Browning the greatest optimist, of the Nineteenth Century; yet they both believed that behind the phenomena of existence—originating, controlling, supporting, and driving all things that appear to the senses—was the supreme force, the ultimate reality, which both called Will. To Schopenhauer this Immanent Will (as in Thomas Hardy's *Dynasts*) was Unconscious, totally unlike anything commonly called Providence. To Robert Browning the Immanent Will was not only intelligent; it was Conscious Love. Schopenhauer attempted to account for the superiority of music over all the other arts, and for its pro-

founder significance to humanity, by insisting that poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture belonged to the world of "idea" (*Vorstellung*), but that music was the direct expression of the Infinite Will. Browning, so far as his dramatic poetry may be taken as a revelation of his own meaning,—and we may without doubt be justified in taking *Abt Vogler* and *Charles Avison* in that fashion,—believed that painting, poetry, sculpture and architecture were the results of human effort; but that music came straight from the divine source. Thus when we see the Sistine Madonna, or read *Hamlet*, we admire the extraordinary power of Raphael, of Shakespeare. But when we hear the Ninth Symphony, *we are listening to the voice of God*. Bee-

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thoven was more passive than active, the channel through which flowed the Divine Will.

Schopenhauer's philosophy of music is stated toward the close of the third book of the first volume of *The World as Will and Idea*, and I make no apology for lengthy extracts, as the subject is of the deepest interest and importance to all lovers of music:

It stands alone, quite cut off from all the other arts. In it we do not recognise the copy or repetition of any Idea of existence in the world. Yet it is such a great and exceedingly noble art, its effect on the inmost nature of man is so powerful, and it is so entirely and deeply understood by him in his inmost consciousness as a perfectly universal language, the distinctness of

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which surpasses even that of the perceptible world itself. . . . Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but *the copy of the Will itself*, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself. . . . The composition of melody, the disclosure in it of all the deepest secrets of human willing and feeling, is the work of genius, whose action, which is more apparent here than anywhere else, lies far from all reflection and conscious intention, and may be called an inspiration. . . . The composer reveals the inner nature of the world, and expresses the deepest wisdom in a language which his reason does not understand; as a person under the influence of mesmerism tells things of which he has no conception

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when he awakes. Therefore in the composer, more than in any other artist, the man is entirely separated and distinct from the artist. . . . The *Adagio* speaks of the pain of a great and noble effort which despises all trifling happiness. But how wonderful is the effect of the *minor* and *major*! How astounding that the change of half a tone, the entrance of a minor third instead of a major [note Browning's *Toccata of Galuppi's*] at once and inevitably forces upon us an anxious and painful feeling, and from which again we are just as instantaneously delivered by the major. . . . But it must never be forgotten, in the investigation of all these analogies I have pointed out, that music has no direct, but merely an indirect relation to them, for it never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself of all phenomena, the will itself. It

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does not therefore express this or that particular and definite joy, this or that sorrow, or pain, or horror, or delight, or merriment, or peace of mind; but joy, sorrow, pain, horror, delight, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without accessories, and therefore without their motives. Yet we completely understand them in this extracted quintessence. Hence it arises that our imagination is so easily excited by music, and now seeks to give form to that invisible yet actively moved spirit-world which speaks to us directly, and clothe it with flesh and blood, i. e., to embody it in an analogous example. This is the origin of the song with words, and finally of the opera, the text of which should therefore never forsake that subordinate position in order to make itself the chief thing and the music a mere means of

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expressing it, which is a great misconception and a piece of utter perversity; for music always expresses only the quintessence of life and its events, never these themselves, and therefore their differences do not always affect it. . . . If music is too closely united to the words, and tries to form itself according to the events, it is striving to speak a language which is not its own. . . . The unutterable depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats through our consciousness as the vision of a paradise firmly believed in yet ever inexplicable, rests on the fact that it restores to us all the emotions of our inmost nature, but entirely without reality and far removed from their pain. So also the seriousness which is essential to it, which excludes the absurd from its direct and peculiar province, is to be explained by the fact that its object is not the idea, with

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reference to which alone deception and absurdity are possible; but its object is directly the will, and this is essentially the most serious of all things, for it is that on which all depends.

Observe Schopenhauer's remarks about dance-music: the digression and deviation from the key-note, "not only to the harmonious intervals of the third and dominant, but to every tone, to the dissonant sevenths and to the superfluous degrees; yet there always follows a constant return to the key-note. . . . Dance-music in the minor seems to indicate the failure of that trifling happiness which we ought rather to despise"—all this seems to be echoed by Browning in *A Toccata of Galuppi's*:

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What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive,
sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions,
those solutions—"Must we die?"
Those commiserating sevenths — "Life
might last! we can but try!"
"Were you happy?"—"Yes."—"And are
you still as happy?"—"Yes. And
you?"
—"Then, more kisses!"—"Did I stop
them, when a million seemed too
few?"
Hark, the dominant's persistence till it
must be answered to!
So, an octave struck the answer.

If Browning had read Schopenhauer in the original, as is by no means unlikely, these technical allusions in *A Toccata* seem to me a reminiscence of the German philosopher's remarks

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on dance-music, for this particular poem was published in 1855, when Schopenhauer's fame was spreading rapidly over Europe. But it is not with superficial references or echoes of detail that I am impressed, but by the fact that the philosophy of music set forth in *Abt Vogler* (1864) and in *Charles Avison* (1887) is identical with that of Schopenhauer—always remembering that Browning's conception of the Ultimate Will is of something conscious and intentional, rather than of something unconscious and purposeless; in other words, Christian rather than atheistic. The musician *Abt Vogler* has just been extemporising, and he knows that he has been divinely inspired:

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All through my keys that gave their sounds
to a wish of my soul,

All through my soul that praised as its
wish flowed visibly forth,

All through music and me! For think, had
I painted the whole,

Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the
process so wonder-worth:

Had I written the same, made verse,—still,
effect proceeds from cause,

Ye know why the forms are fair, ye
hear how the tale is told;

It is all triumphant art, but art in obedi-
ence to laws,

Painter and poet are proud in the artist-
list enrolled:—

But here is the finger of God, a flash of
the will that can,

Existent behind all laws, that made
them, and, lo, they are!

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And I know not if, save in this, such gift
 be allowed to man,

 That out of three sounds he frame, not
 a fourth sound, but a star. . . .

Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow
 to clear,

 Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of
 the weal and woe;

But God has a few of us whom he whis-
 pers in the ear;

 The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis
 we musicians know.

In *Charles Avison*, Browning again makes a distinction between music and all the other arts, which brings to the memory the distinction made by Schopenhauer. The other arts, says Browning, express the intellectual effort of man; music expresses something deeper, something impossible to fix defi-

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nately, man's Soul, and hence, the
universal Soul:

There is no truer truth obtainable
By Man than comes of music. "Soul"—
(accept

A word which vaguely names what no
adept

In word-use fits and fixes so that still
Thing shall not slip word's fetter and re-
main

Innominate as first, yet, free again,
Is no less recognised the absolute
Fact underlying that same other fact
Concerning which no cavil can dispute
Our nomenclature when we call it
"Mind"—

Something not Matter)—"Soul," who
seeks shall find

Distinct beneath that something. You
exact

An illustrative image? This may suit.

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We see a work: the worker works behind,
Invisible himself. Suppose his act
Be to o'erarch a gulf: he digs, transports,
Shapes and, through enginery—all sizes,
sorts,

Lays stone by stone until a floor compact
Proves our bridged causeway. So works
Mind—by stress

Of faculty, with loose facts, more or less,
Builds up our solid knowledge: all the
same,

Underneath rolls what Mind may hide not
tame,

An element which works beyond our guess,
Soul, the unsounded sea—whose life of
surge,

Spite of all superstructure, lets emerge,
In flower and foam, Feeling from out the
deeps

Mind arrogates no mastery upon—
Distinct indisputably. . . .

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To match and mate
Feeling with knowledge,—make as mani-
fest
Soul's work as Mind's work, turbulence as
rest,
Hates, loves, joys, woes, hopes, fears, that
rise and sink
Ceaselessly. . . .
How we Feel, hard and fast as what we
Know—
This were the prize and is the puzzle!—
which
Music essays to solve. . . .
Could Music rescue thus from Soul's pro-
found,
Give feeling immortality by sound,
Then, were she queenliest of arts!

Whether Browning deliberately
took his philosophy of music from
Schopenhauer, or developed it inde-

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pendently, I cannot say; but the resemblance is interesting. And we know that Browning loved to take pessimistic speculation and give it an optimistic interpretation.

IV

IN ADDITION TO BROWNING's four poems on music, *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*, *Abt Vogler*, and *Charles Avison*, there are many references in his other works to its power and significance. In his first poem, *Pauline*, written at the age of twenty, he paid this tribute:

For music (which is earnest of a heaven
Seeing we know emotions strange by it,
Not else to be revealed,) is as a voice,
A low voice calling fancy, as a friend,
To the green woods in the gay summer
time:

And she fills all the way with dancing
shapes

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Which have made painters pale, and they
go on
While stars look at them and winds call to
them
As they leave life's path for the twilight
world
Where the dead gather.

Music is indeed evidence of a life beyond the grave, for indeed we do know "emotions strange by it, not else to be revealed." It expresses passions and thoughts that are above and below the farthest reaches of words or pictures. We are positively and profoundly affected by it; its impression on our consciousness is so immediate that it is more real than the experiences of our daily life; and yet there is nothing in our daily life which corresponds to these sensations and emo-

tions. It is perhaps telling us of realities beyond the range of earthly existence.

In William De Morgan's fine novel, *Joseph Vance*, there is a scene I shall never forget. Joseph is walking on the street one day, when through an open window he hears a woman playing the piano. She is playing the Waldstein Sonata by Beethoven. Joseph listens entranced, and he says there is a theme in that sonata—I know it well; it is in the first movement—that “proves the immortality of the soul.”

Such music could not have come from a transitory animal; it came from divine inspiration, and is a proof of the sublime destiny of man.

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God has a few of us whom he whispers in
the ear;

The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we
musicians know.

AFTERWORD
MUSIC AND
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